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# Intelligence Report

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ARGENTINE ATTITUDE TOWARDS UN ACTION

AND

HEMISPHERE DEFENSE

*Montague*

DEPARTMENT OF STATE



Office of Intelligence Research

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the Communist attack on South Korea, in June 1950, Argentina appeared about to abandon its traditional isolationist attitude towards world conflicts between the Great Powers and actually cooperate with the US and the UN. Argentine ratification of the Rio Treaty, which had been tabled since 1948 in the Chamber of Deputies, seemed to indicate that Argentina was also ready to cooperate with the US in erecting an effective system of hemisphere defense. The basic anti-US sentiments of the Perón Administration, however, appear to have been only temporarily pushed into the background by Argentina's immediate desire for US assurances as to allocation of markets, essential imports, credits and military supplies in the event that a Third World War was imminent. When it became evident that an all-out East-West conflict was not at hand and that Argentine public opinion was adverse to active participation in Korea with the UN, Perón retreated to his former anti-US and isolationist policy. His backtracking was probably hastened by resistance within the Peronista Party and by the insistence of the Opposition Unión Cívica Radical Party that Argentina maintain her traditional policy of keeping out of world conflicts between the great powers.

It was thought that the virulent anti-US campaign of the Peronista propaganda machine might drop off sharply after the national elections of 1951. The decline has been only relative, however, and the emphasis has been shifted to alleged sinister US designs on the sovereignty and the economies of other Latin American countries. The present Peronista press and radio attack on US efforts to organize an effective defense system for the Western Hemisphere may reflect some fear of "encirclement" as a result of US military assistance negotiations. Argentine propaganda media have also tried to promote a bloc of Latin American producers of strategic materials to secure higher prices from the US. Perón has openly sought a revival of the ABC block as a preliminary to a Latin American confederation which under Argentine leadership would be a barrier to US plans for defense of the Hemisphere.

Although the Peronista press and radio have bitterly criticized US negotiations for military assistance agreements with other Latin American countries, Perón may take the risk involved in seeking a similar agreement if it appears there is no other way to maintain Argentina's position vis a vis Brazil and Chile. If granted, however, Argentine use of military assistance might not be in accordance with

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what the US may consider to be the best interests of the Hemisphere. Although an armed attack on its neighbors seems unlikely, Argentina might use US arms to coerce those neighbors or to regain Argentina's tierra irredenta--the Falkland Islands--or to make good Argentine claims in the Antarctic regions. The record of Argentine failure to cooperate effectively with the US indicates that Argentine assurances would be designed as a temporary expedient to achieve Argentina's immediate needs and would be subject to domestic political requirements.

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ARGENTINE ATTITUDE TOWARDS UN ACTION AND HEMISPHERE DEFENSE

I. Rio Treaty

Argentina signed the Rio Treaty, with reservations, on September 2, 1947. The Argentine Senate approved ratification on July 22, 1948. In August 1948, the Treaty was tabled in the Chamber of Deputies. Although the Peronista bloc had the necessary votes to secure approval, Peron apparently preferred not to risk an open debate with the Opposition on foreign policy until the time was right.

On June 28, 1950, in the atmosphere of a war crisis, the Peronista bloc in the Chamber of Deputies brought up approval of the Treaty and forced it through the Chamber that same day. The Opposition Union Civica Radical (UCR) Deputies abstained from voting after their requests for more time to examine the Treaty were overridden. UCR leader Arturo Frondizi connected Peronista zeal for approval to the granting of the \$125,000,000 US Export-Import Bank loan and declared his Party preferred the maintenance of the national dignity at whatever economic or financial sacrifice.

Peron's action in securing ratification of the Rio Treaty appears to have been motivated by Argentina's immediate needs. If World War III were imminent, ratification would improve Argentina's position in securing US assurances as to allocation of markets, essential imports and financial credits as well as arms shipments. The visit of Assistant Secretary of State Miller in February 1950, and the Export-Import Bank loan had also helped by improving US-Argentine relations which had deteriorated in 1948-1949. The Peronista press made haste to justify the Administration's desertion of its vaunted Third Position and it seemed as though Argentina was about to support the US with more than words.

II. Argentine Support for US and UN Action in Korea

In the period immediately following ratification of the Rio Treaty, Argentine official statements, the Peronista press and Peron's own speeches indicated approval of and support for UN and US action

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1. República Argentina, Cámara de Diputados, Diario de Sesiones, June 28, 1950.

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in Korea.<sup>1</sup> In early July 1950, Perón told a group of visiting US newspapermen that he believed the US was acting very intelligently and that the UN could count on the support of the member nations to give effect to its decisions.<sup>2</sup> In an official reply to the Secretary General of the UN, made public on July 18, 1950, Argentina stated that she was at the disposal of the Unified Command and would fulfill her commitments under the United Nations Charter.<sup>3</sup> Although Crítica, an Administration daily, had suggested on July 16 that contingents of volunteer troops would be sent to Korea Foreign Minister Paz, in his press conference on the day the Argentine reply was made public, assured the Argentine public that "consultation of the people" would precede involvement in military action abroad.<sup>4</sup> This brief period--to July 18, 1950--was the high tide of Argentine pro-UN sentiment. To date (March 1952) the sum of direct Argentine assistance for the UN in Korea has been to send a shipment of canned meat to Korea.<sup>5</sup>

III. Argentine Return to the Third Position

The Argentine reaction to the prospect of actual participation in Korea indicated that it was not an issue popular enough to create widespread public support for abandonment of isolationism.<sup>6</sup> On July 18, 1950 Perón backtracked with a declaration that "In the face of the present difficult international situation Argentina will adopt only the attitude dictated by her people. Argentina has her own plans for the present and future, and whatever she does must redound to the benefit of her own interests, and not to those of some one else."<sup>7</sup> Thereafter the Administration and its propaganda machine laid increasing stress on the Third Position as Argentina's salvation in what it

- 
1. T-559 and T-561, Buenos Aires, June 29, 1950. (Restricted).  
T-564, Buenos Aires, June 30, 1950. (Restricted). Weeka  
No. 26, Buenos Aires, June 30, 1950. (Confidential). D-7,  
Buenos Aires, July 5, 1950. (Restricted)
  2. FBIS, July 17, 1950. (Restricted).
  3. D-71, Buenos Aires, July 18, 1951. (Restricted).
  4. D-86, Buenos Aires, July 20, 1950. (Restricted).
  5. D-966, Buenos Aires, December 15, 1951. (Restricted).
  6. D-86, Buenos Aires, July 20, 1950. (Restricted). Weeka No. 28,  
Buenos Aires, July 14, 1950. (Confidential).
  7. D-71, Buenos Aires, July 18, 1950. (Restricted). D-105, Buenos  
Aires, July 24, 1950. (Restricted).

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described as a struggle between the US and Soviet Russia for world domination. The obvious purpose of the Administration's tactics has been to reinforce public resistance to any abandonment of isolationism. In November 1950, Juan Otero, Argentine Ambassador to Moscow, is reported to have told the Brazilian press that "What is taking place in Korea is a repetition of that which occurred on other occasions, since it concerns an extremely wealthy region and is thus sought after by governments of other countries."

Since January 1951, the theme that the struggle in Korea is a preliminary to an inevitable war between the imperialistic forces of Communism and capitalism, spearheaded by the Soviet Union and the US respectively, has been increasingly emphasized by all the propaganda media at the disposal of the Peron Administration. An article in an August 1951 issue of El Lider, the organ of Minister of the Interior Borlenghi, stated that the US was looking to other countries for "human material" to fight its battles and thus save US lives. The article concluded by declaring that "Even though Pan-American solidarity has not been denied by any of the Latin American countries, it is quite evident that our situation and our obligations and responsibilities in the event of another war cannot be considered on the same plane as those of the United States and their allies and European dependents."

The articles signed Descartes, which Embassy Buenos Aires believe are authorized if not written by Peron, have consistently defended the Third Position with more brickbats for the US than for the Soviet Union. Descartes has written that World War III is inevitable because the preparations have reached a stage where the wiser course of avoidance of war would bring economic disaster (to the US).<sup>4</sup> According to Descartes capitalism and communism are bound to disappear. The followers of Peron thus have no reason for engaging in a third world war in which every one will lose and which has no meaning for the Peronistas, who have solved all their problems.

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1. Weeka No. 29, Buenos Aires, July 21, 1950. (Confidential).
  2. FBIS - November 21, 1950. (Restricted).
  3. D-298, Buenos Aires, August 29, 1951. Enclosure No. 1. (Unclassified).
  4. D-401, Buenos Aires, September 14, 1951. Enclosure No. 1. (Restricted).
  5. D-144, Buenos Aires, July 27, 1951. Enclosure No. 1. (Restricted).

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In meetings of the UN General Assembly prior to the last session the Argentine delegation has usually given good support to the US on East-West issues, after making it clear that the Argentine position was independently taken. During the Sixth Session of the General Assembly in Paris (late 1951 and early 1952) there was a noticeable change in the Argentine voting record. Argentina held more closely to its Third Position than before and on important matters pertaining to the East-West conflict frequently abstained from voting.

Argentine isolationism in conflicts involving the Great Powers has deep roots in the Argentine past. The nation was kept out of World War I by President Irigoyen and very reluctantly entered World War II only after the outcome was clearly evident. The UCR block in the Chamber of Deputies has consistently advocated an isolationist policy for Argentina and in so doing has put pressure on the Administration to maintain a similar position because of isolationism's appeal to the masses to the extreme nationalists and to an important sector of the Peronista Party. Radical leaders have made it clear that their admiration for the US has not influenced them to support the UN in the Far East. On September 1, 1950 Dellepiane, Radical representative on the Chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee, declared that if Chinese leaders appeared bound to Moscow it was because of Western exploitations.<sup>1</sup> In the December 27, 1951 debate in the Chamber over approval of the Japanese Peace Treaty, Frondizi, the leader of the Radical bloc, described the Treaty as figuring conspicuously in the strategic plans for a possible future war. He stated flatly that Argentines should have nothing to do with the struggle for domination over Asia and the Pacific Ocean.<sup>2</sup>

It is questionable if Perón would have given even vocal support to UN action in Korea had he foreseen the public reaction against Argentine involvement. His ability to support the UN—even did he wish to do so—has been circumscribed by the forces of isolationism and nationalism to which he has catered and which he has built up with the Administration's propaganda machine. On January 31, 1952, Perón made the flat statement that not a single Argentine soldier would be sent to fight beyond Argentine borders and that his Administration had not entered and never would enter into any treaty which would compel

1. República Argentina, Congreso Nacional, Diario de Sesiones, September 1, 1950.
2. República Argentina, Congreso Nacional, Diario de Sesiones, December 27, 1951.

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Argentines to adopt a different policy.<sup>1</sup> The Peronista press, including Descartes, now describes the UN as a mere instrument of the US and the place for quarrelsome chitchat.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. Hemisphere Defense

The Perón Administration's brief enthusiasm for the Rio Treaty brought new assurances of Argentine solidarity for measures to be taken in defense of the Western Hemisphere. Those assurances have since changed to bitter criticism of US efforts to make hemisphere defense really effective. Argentine cooperation at the March-April 1951 Conference of Foreign Ministers in Washington was not assured when the Conference convened. It apparently was secured in good part by tactful US handling of both the Argentine delegation and the issues presented before the conference.

Argentine agreement to measures taken to tighten hemisphere defense was, however, weakened by the reservation that use of its armed forces was dependent upon the decision of the Argentine people. Other Latin American governments have publicly interpreted their undertakings in a similar sense. Peronista press attacks on the Conference, however, have supported neutrality and condemned US interest in military cooperation as an affront to Latin American sovereignty. Only in Guatemala has another official propaganda machine been turned against the US position. Military and economic differences were headlined in an attempt to portray Argentine as successfully opposing the United States on these two aspects of hemisphere cooperation. The Argentine theme that the best way to combat Communism in Latin America is to raise the levels of living by paying "fair" prices to Latin American producers was later frequently cited in support of a raw materials producer bloc under Argentine leadership.

Latin American resentment over economic losses allegedly suffered as a result of inflated prices for US exports following World War II has been carefully cultivated by Argentine propaganda media. Argentina's neighbors, Bolivia and Chile, have been encouraged to nationalize their

- 
1. D-1239, Buenos Aires, February 11, 1952. (Secret).
  2. D-1060, Buenos Aires, January 10, 1952. (Restricted). D-1092, Buenos Aires, January 14, 1952. (Unclassified).

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tin and copper resources to end "Yankee exploitation."<sup>1</sup> Even though nationalization would not cut off US supplies of these two vital materials, production might conceivably decrease and prices might be substantially increased. Argentine propaganda has also urged Latin American countries to reserve their supplies of raw materials for the future and to hold out for higher prices from the US.

One of the most unsavory episodes in the obstructionist campaign directed from the Casa Rosada was the exploitation of the alleged Benson plot. This myth of mid-1951 was headlined by the Peronista press and radio in a deliberate attempt to discredit the Armed Forces of the US and disrupt hemispheric cooperation.<sup>2</sup> This deliberate lie was given quasi-official sanction when used by the columnist Descartes, who, if not Perón himself, at the very least has Perón's blessing.

#### V. Perón's Attempts to Revive ABC Coalition

Another Perón attempt to interfere with US plans for developing an effective system of defense for the Western Hemisphere has been his appeals for a revival of the ABC group (Argentina, Brazil and Chile). The Argentine President suggested union of the three countries as a solution to their problems in July 1950.<sup>4</sup> In late August 1951, he warned that victory in a third world war by the "Dollar Curtain" countries would only mean colonialism for the ABC countries but that "United, we will be unconquerable."<sup>5</sup>

1. La Epoca, Buenos Aires, December 6, 7, 8, 11 and 26, 1951.
2. D-1046, Buenos Aires, December 28, 1951. (Restricted).
2. D-1875, Buenos Aires, June 1, 1951. (Restricted). D-1959, Buenos Aires, June 14, 1951. (Confidential).
3. D-1724, Buenos Aires, May 4, 1951. (Restricted). D-1095, Buenos Aires, June 7, 1951. (Restricted). D-1959, Buenos Aires, June 14, 1951. (Confidential). D-1139, Buenos Aires, January 18, 1952. (Restricted).
4. FBIS-July 20, 1950.
5. D-392, Rio de Janeiro, September 5, 1951. Enclosure No. 1. (Restrict

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- On December 20, 1951, Descartes expanded this theme by suggesting that Argentina, Brazil and Chile unite as a preliminary to the formation of a South American confederation spreading northward and bringing together all nations of Latin origin. The columnist returned to this theme, late in January 1952, when he cited alleged US designs on Canada as proof that Latin American countries must unite in order to protect themselves against the US.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Peron's plans for such a confederation or even an ABC bloc under Argentine leadership appear to have little chance of succeeding should not be permitted to obscure the main point--that Argentine propaganda has consistently attempted to embarrass US attempts to organize an effective system of hemisphere defense.<sup>3</sup>
- The Peronista press has bitterly criticized US negotiations with other Latin American governments for bilateral military assistance agreements as authorized by the Mutual Security Act of 1951. It has deliberately attempted to obstruct the consummation of these agreements with charges that they will lead to US invasion of the signing country's sovereignty. When the US negotiations with Mexico broke down the pro-Administration papers in Buenos Aires seized on the announcement and exploited it with obvious pleasure. They gave the impression to the Argentine public that the Mexican-US negotiations broke down because Mexico refused to send troops abroad, would not permit US troops on Mexican soil and rejected US demands which would "gravely affect" Mexican agriculture and industry. The Peronista press emphasized Mexico's alleged defense of her sovereignty and criticized the Pentagon for its "crude" demands in return for military aid.<sup>3</sup> On February 28, 1952 Descartes assured his readers that, since Latin America was protected by its isolated position, continental defense could be best assumed by individual action of each country without the costly aid of the US.<sup>4</sup>
- Argentina has not been invited to negotiate a military assistance agreement. Foreign Minister Remorino has expressed the fear that, as a consequence, the balance-of-power in Southern South America will be altered to Argentina's disadvantage.<sup>5</sup> Argentina has traditionally relied on that
1. La Democracia, Buenos Aires, December 20, 1951. D-1028, Buenos Aires, December 26, 1951. (Restricted).
  2. La Democracia, Buenos Aires, January 24, 1952. D-1171, Buenos Aires, January 25, 1952. (Restricted).
  3. D-1314, Buenos Aires, February 27, 1952. (Unclassified).
  4. La Democracia, Buenos Aires, February 28, 1952.
  5. D-1134, Buenos Aires, January 17, 1952. (Confidential).

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balance-of-power to safeguard its security interests. Perón's efforts to revive the ABC bloc may be a symptom of his apprehension over US military and economic agreements with Brazil and Chile. If it appears that he cannot otherwise forestall closer Brazilian and Chilean ties with the US, Perón may eventually feel forced to seek similar agreements to restore Argentina's position vis à vis Brazil and Chile; even though such action would alienate the nationalistic and isolationist sentiments he has cultivated and depended upon for public support. If Perón decided to take that risk, Argentina might be able to qualify for military assistance under US legislation and would probably give the necessary assurances. Domestic political needs might again rule, however, as regards carrying out such agreements once Perón had secured what he wanted in the way of military assistance. Strengthened Argentine Armed Forces might not necessarily be used in what the US would conceive to be the best interests of hemisphere defense. They might even be used to coerce or otherwise put pressure on Argentine neighbors or to regain Argentina irredenta--the Falkland Islands--or to support Argentine claims in Antarctica. In his May 1, 1951 Annual Message to the Argentine National Congress, Perón made it clear that Argentina's prime condition for joining the Western Hemisphere defense system is US support for Argentina's claims to the British-held Falkland Islands.

**VI. Conclusion**

In the event of a war between the USSR and the US Perón might carry out his informal promises that Argentina would be on the side of the US.<sup>2</sup> The Perón administration has, however, deliberately encouraged the belief that Argentina has nothing to gain by participation in a Third World War and is safely outside the firing line. On this point Perón and his UCR opponents see eye to eye. As a result Perón is now more or less imprisoned in a net of his own weaving. Even if he did desire to cooperate with the US the strength of Argentine isolationism, which he has nurtured, would be a strong deterring factor. In the short run the US is perhaps most useful to Perón as a scapegoat for his economic difficulties. Over the long run he may feel that a military assistance agreement with the US is the only way Argentina can maintain her position vis à vis Brazil and Chile. The US, however, would have little reason to expect Argentina to carry out whatever assurances Perón might give as to the utilization of the arms supplies it would receive.

1. D-1706, Buenos Aires, May 3, 1951. (Restricted).
2. D-1755, Buenos Aires, May 10, 1951. (Confidential).

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Argentine attempts to discredit US and UN action in Korea, to form a Latin American bloc against the US and to obstruct hemisphere defense preparations have been partially explained as being part of the November 1951 election background. The election is now over and although some aspects of the Peronista anti-US campaign have been toned down the above items are still emphasized. It is no longer possible to pass these attacks off as political campaigning. The totalitarian nature of the Perón administration with its virtually complete censorship controls gives what amounts to official sanction to the anti-US and anti-democratic expressions of the Argentine press and radio.<sup>1</sup> Although the extent and significance of their relationship is not entirely clear, there is substantial evidence that dissident Communist leader Rodolfo Puiggiós has access to Perón. Even though Perón may not have ties with international Communism, his Administration has taken a position which is almost as useful to Moscow as if it were directed from the Kremlin.

The Argentine position is due in large part to the following three factors:

1. The requirements of domestic politics in an atmosphere of intense nationalism. "Plucking the Eagle's tailfeathers" is as useful in present day Argentine politics as was "Twisting the Lion's tail" in US politics during the 19th century.
2. Argentine ambitions to play a leading role in Latin American affairs and particularly in Southern South America. For over half a century Argentina not only has balked at following where the US leads but has also expressed strong convictions as to the merits of her own qualifications for leadership.
3. The general effect produced in Latin America by the Soviet Union's tactics of resorting, at least temporarily, to propaganda and diplomatic weapons in preference to overt military aggression in the East-West conflict. Under these circumstances isolationist and anti-US groups are able to appeal to mass support for opposition to US mobilization of Western forces. Argentina, with a government which has encouraged such groups, is an extreme example of this tendency. Perón's "Third Position" assumes much more attractive proportions in such an atmosphere than it would if overt Soviet aggression were threatening Latin America.

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1. D-1196, Buenos Aires, January 31, 1952. (Confidential).

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